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# Research on Advertising Ethics: Past, Present, and Future

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*Research on advertising ethics, as revealed by a search of the ABI/Inform database, shows that advertising ethics has been, and continues to be, a mainstream topic in advertising research. Present beliefs about such research, as expressed by a random sample of academicians in the American Academy of Advertising, include the belief that practitioners are uninterested in ethics research. Beliefs about the future of such research, as forecast by the same academicians, include the need for better measures related to ethics. Other promising research topics are use of deception, advertising to children, ads for legal vices, negative political ads, and stereotyping in ads.*

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Advertising ethics affects the practice of our lives, and also the practice of business, in subtle and prominent ways. Indeed, advertising ethics concerns us all—academicians, ad agency personnel, advertisers, attorneys, consumers, media personnel, and regulators—in one way or another.

To show the previous and continuing relevance to advertising scholars of research on advertising ethics, we introduce this special issue by answering four perspective-rendering questions.

- (1) Is recent research on advertising ethics in the mainstream of research on advertising and marketing ethics?
- (2) Is advertising ethics an exhausted research topic?
- (3) What do advertising scholars believe are the major impediments to research on advertising ethics?
- (4) What do advertising scholars believe are the best opportunities for research on advertising ethics?

To answer the first two questions, which address the past and present, we queried the *ABI/Inform* database. To answer the last two questions, which address the future, we surveyed a random sample of academicians in the American Academy of Advertising (henceforth AAA).

## The Past and Present of Research on Advertising Ethics

### *A Mainstream Topic?*

Is advertising ethics now a mainstream topic in advertising literature? Judging from an informal literature review, the number and diversity of recent articles on the topic suggest that the answer is "Yes." Some recent articles examine the ethicality of ads with exploitive appeals (LaTour and Zahra 1989; Tansey, Hyman, and Brown 1992), persuasive appeals (Crisp 1987; Lee 1987; Hyman and Tansey 1990), and stereotyped actors (Green 1993; Peterson 1992). Others examine the ethicality of ads for professional services (Bullard and Snizek 1988; Mangold 1987; Stafford 1988), politicians or political causes (Banker 1992; Lacznia and Caywood 1987), and questionable products such as cigarettes (Pomeroy, Castellano, Becker, Johnson, and Brown 1992; Quinn 1989; Zinkhan et al. 1989). Still others exam-

ine the ethicality of targeting ads to children (Federal Trade Commission 1981; Kinsey 1987) and other subgroups such as the elderly (Benet, Pitts, and LaTour 1993; Peterson 1992). Many textbooks on advertising (e.g., Belch and Belch 1993; Krugman, Reid, Dunn, and Barban 1994; Wells, Burnett, and Moriarty 1992) and marketing ethics (e.g., Laczniak and Murphy 1993; Smith and Quelch 1993) now include a chapter on advertising ethics. Finally, social critiques of the ethicality of consumer advertising remain popular (e.g., Clark 1989; Ewen 1988; Schudson 1984).

A more formal search of the *ABI/Inform* database supports this "yes" answer. From January 1987 to June 1993, the forty-seven advertising, marketing, general business, and business ethics journals indexed in *ABI/Inform* published 9860 articles. Table 1 shows the popularity of advertising articles; *advertising* is a keyword for 12.5 percent (1228 of 9860) of these *ABI/Inform*-indexed articles. In contrast, *ethic(s)(al)* appear as keywords for only 3.3 percent (41 of 1228) of all advertising articles, which seems to suggest that advertising ethics is a minor subdomain of advertising. However, the percent of advertising articles indexed under *ethics(s)(al)* is similar to the percent of advertising articles indexed under many well-established subdomains of advertising, such as *international* (4.8 percent) and *regulation* (4.0 percent); other than articles indexed under *consumer attitudes* or *consumer behavior*, which comprise 21.5 percent (264 of 1228) of advertising articles, the percent of articles indexed under many common advertising terms is similar to the percent of articles indexed under *ethic(s)(al)*.

Although articles on advertising ethics subsume a typical portion of the advertising literature, they subsume a major portion of the marketing ethics literature. Table 1 shows that *ethic(s)(al)* and *advertising/marketing* jointly appear as keywords for 127 (41 + 86) articles. Of these 127 articles, 32.3 percent (41 of 127) concern advertising ethics. Table 1 also shows that *ethic(s)(al)* and *advertising/marketing* jointly appear as keywords for fifty articles in *Business & Society Review* and *Journal of Business Ethics*, the two major business ethics journals indexed in the *ABI/Inform* database. Of these fifty articles, 34 percent (17 of 50) concern advertising ethics. Thus, articles on advertising ethics comprise a major segment of the marketing ethics articles published in the business literature in general and business ethics literature in particular.

The percent of articles on advertising ethics in a recent bibliography on marketing ethics by Bol et al.

(1993) suggests a similar conclusion. Articles on advertising ethics constitute 27.5 percent (61 of 222) of listed articles; articles on the next most popular topics, such as personal selling and sales management (14.9 percent), marketing strategy (12.6 percent), international marketing (11.3 percent), marketing education (8.1 percent), public relations (5.4 percent), and retailing (5.0 percent), constitute a far smaller percent of listed articles.

### ***An Exhausted Topic?***

Have researchers exhausted the topic of advertising ethics? This time, judging from the marketing literature, the answer is "No." First, only a handful of topics dominate the recent research on advertising ethics. Table 2 shows that *ethic(s)(al)* and *advertising* jointly appear in the *ABI/Inform* abstracts of 17 additional articles. Even within this more-inclusive set, almost two-thirds of the articles examine one of four topics: advertising of professional services (25.8 percent), advertising by health care providers or the health care industry (17.2 percent), advertising of tobacco or alcohol (12.1 percent), and advertising agencies or marketing research(ers) (10.3 percent). Second, researchers who have written on advertising ethics have much left to contribute; only one researcher authored three articles on advertising ethics (Robin Peterson), and seven researchers authored two articles on advertising ethics (Lawrence Chonko, Shelby Hunt, Michael Hyman, Michael LaTour, Gene Laczniak, William Kilbourne, and Richard Tansey). Finally, many journals have yet to contribute to the advertising ethics literature; two journals, *Journal of Business Ethics* and *International Journal of Advertising*, have published more than half (22 of 41, or 53.7 percent) of the articles on advertising ethics.

## **Beliefs About The Future of Research on Advertising Research**

### ***The Questionnaire***

After reviewing the literature on ethics and advertising, we prepared an initial list of *prime areas for future research* and *impediments to research*. *Prime areas of future research* on advertising ethics are the topics that seem relevant to advertising researchers and practitioners (e.g., alcohol and tobacco advertising). *Impediments to research* on advertising ethics are the obstacles faced by advertising researchers who try to publish such research in scholarly journals

**Table 1**  
**Ethics Articles Indexed in *ABI/Inform* by Journal, January 1987 to June 1993<sup>1</sup>**

Journal	Total Articles	Total Ad Articles	Total Ad Ethics	Ad Ethics Key- words	Other
Akron Business & Economic Review <sup>2</sup>	185	6	1	1	0
Applied Marketing Research <sup>3</sup>	71	4	0	0	2
Business & Society Review	326	22	7	4	3
Business Horizons	446	4	0	0	1
California Management Review	202	1	0	0	0
Columbia J.of World Business	238	9	0	0	1
European J.of Marketing	295	30	1	1	2
Harvard Business Review	491	10	0	0	1
Industrial Marketing Management	291	22	0	0	0
International J.of Advertising	170	170	9	9	0
International J.of Bank Marketing	211	9	0	0	0
International J.of Physical Distribution & Logistics Management	236	2	1	0	0
International J.of Research in Marketing	119	7	0	0	0
International Marketing Review	153	7	0	0	1
J.of Advertising	146	146	4	4	0
J.of Advertising Research	313	313	0	0	0
J.of Business	164	9	0	0	0
J.of Business & Industrial Marketing	112	14	0	0	2
J.of Business Communications	122	2	0	0	0
J.of Business Ethics	586	20	20	13	30
J.of Business Research	307	17	1	1	3
J.of Consumer Affairs	117	7	0	0	1
J.of Consumer Marketing	197	27	1	1	0
J.of Consumer Policy	139	16	0	0	0
J.of Consumer Research	285	55	0	0	0
J.of Direct Marketing <sup>4</sup>	34	10	0	0	0
J.of Health Care Marketing	211	24	0	0	5
J.of International Business Studies	172	2	0	0	1
J.of Macromarketing	65	5	0	0	6
J.of Marketing	182	19	1	0	4
J.of Marketing Research	272	30	1	0	3
J.of Professional Services Marketing	196	29	5	4	2
J.of Public Policy & Marketing	95	49	1	1	0

continued . . .

J.of Purchasing & Materials Management	144	0	1	0	0
J.of Retailing	99	6	0	0	1
J.of Small Business Management	233	0	1	0	2
J.of the Academy of Marketing Science	227	26	1	1	12
J.of the Market Research Society	168	25	0	0	1
J.of Travel Research	214	7	0	0	0
Management Science	746	10	0	0	0
Mid-Atlantic J.of Business	125	0	1	0	0
Marketing & Research Today <sup>5</sup>	127	15	0	0	0
Marketing Research: A Magazine . . . <sup>6</sup>	68	3	1	1	2
Marketing Science	148	28	0	0	0
Psychology & Marketing <sup>7</sup>	45	11	0	0	0
Public Opinion Quarterly	152	0	0	0	0
Sloan Management Review	215	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9860</b>	<b>1228</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>86</b>

Key:	Total Articles	=	number of articles published during the period
	Total Ad Articles	=	number of articles on advertising published during the period
	Total Ad Ethics	=	number of articles at least partially about advertising ethics published during the period
	Ad Ethics Keywords	=	index keywords and/or title of article included both advertising and ethics
	Other	=	number of articles about ethics and marketing (excluding advertising) published during the period

- Note: (1) Journals not indexed in ABI/Inform include *Journal of Current Issues and Research in Advertising*, *Journal of Marketing Management*, *Marketing Letters*, *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *Business Ethics: A European Review*, and *Business and Professional Ethics Journal*.
- (2) Last ABI/Inform entry dated December 1991
- (3) Last ABI/Inform entry dated Spring/Summer 1991
- (4) First ABI/Inform entry dated Spring 1992
- (5) First ABI/Inform entry dated February 1989
- (6) First issue published in December 1991
- (7) First ABI/Inform entry dated January 1992

(e.g., the lack of relevant theory).

Then, we asked fourteen marketing professors on three university faculties to critique our initial list. Based on their comments, we modified the initial list and presented it anew to the same academicians. Our final list, created after three iterations of this presentation-critique-revision process, consisted of twelve *impediments to research*, five *general areas for future research*, and thirty-three *specific areas for future research*.

We developed a six-page questionnaire consisting of these fifty items and respondent profile questions

(i.e., academic background, advertising research interests, and published work on advertising). We used seven-point Likert scales for all but the respondent profile questions.

*Impediments to Research.* The impediments suggested by the fourteen academicians may be grouped into lack of practitioner interest, lack of sound measures and frameworks, lack of relevant theories in related disciplines, and lack of academic interest. Lack of practitioner interest means that research is impeded by the inapplicability of published findings to business operations, the disinterest of corporations

**Table 2**  
**Issues Covered in Articles About Advertising Ethics, January 1987 to June 1993**

Ethical Issue	Number of Advertising Ethics Articles	Number of Advertising Ethics Articles	Percent of Advertising
Articles			
<i>Professional services</i>		15	25.8%
Accountants	15	5	8.6%
Attorneys	17	4	6.9
Health care providers	9	4	6.9
Other		2	3.4
Health care industry (e.g., hospitals)	12	6	10.3
Television advertising	84	4	6.9
Tobacco	27	4	6.9
Advertising agencies	71	3	5.2
Alcohol	17	3	5.2
Environment or ecology	3	3	5.2
Marketing research(ers)	0 <sup>1</sup>	3	5.2
Minority or ethnic groups	22	3	5.2
Political advertising	10	3	5.2
Older people	16	2	3.4
Sex/AIDS-related	12	2	3.4
Comparative advertising	35	1	1.7
Other (Racial/sexual stereotyping)	? <sup>2</sup>	6	10.4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1221</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>100%</b>

Note: (1) = not listed as subject keywords

(2) = unknown because some articles listed under more than one of the above subject keywords

in sponsoring research on advertising ethics, and the funding constraints that cause researchers to rely on student or other convenience samples. Lack of sound measures and frameworks means that research is impeded by the lack of psychometrically-sound measurement scales and theoretical frameworks in advertising/marketing. Lack of relevant theories in related disciplines means that research is impeded by theoretical shortcomings in anthropology, management, philosophy, psychology, sociology, and advertising/marketing. Lack of academic interest means that research is impeded by a lack of journal editor and reviewer interest, a belief by journal editors and reviewers that advertising ethics is a minor issue, and the difficulty researchers face when they try to relate ethical issues to traditional advertising issues.

*Areas for Future Research.* The thirty-three items suggested by the fourteen academicians may be grouped into types of ads, types of appeals, larger effects on society, advertiser concerns, and legal concerns. Types of ads include ads for legal vices (e.g., ads for tobacco or alcoholic beverages), ads for sex-related products (e.g., condom ads or ads for abortion services), and ads for health care and professional services (e.g., ads for personal care and hygiene products or ads for professional legal services). Types of appeals include the use of questionable appeals (e.g., fear or negative appeals) and stereotypical appeals (e.g., sexual or racial stereotyping). Larger effects on society include value formation (e.g., molding society's material wants) and media content (e.g., the information content of ads). Advertiser concerns include ad

agency concerns (e.g., self-regulation or the ethical codes of ad agencies) and the voice/tone of the ad (e.g., corporate advocacy or comparative ads). Finally, legal concerns include the use of deception, advertising to children, and public service announcements (e.g., anti-drug or anti-cigarette ads).

### The Sample

**Sample Frame.** We mailed questionnaires to all current reviewers for *Journal of Advertising* and a random sample of academicians listed in the 1992 AAA membership directory. In total, we mailed 435 questionnaires, along with personalized cover letters and postage-paid return envelopes, during the first week of April 1992. We received 124 usable responses, which represents a 28.5 percent response rate.

We queried *Journal of Advertising* reviewers because they are experts on the current advertising literature. Furthermore, because these reviewers and other AAA-affiliated academicians are (or typify) the major gatekeepers for publications on advertising ethics (i.e., they review manuscripts for academic journals), a summary of their beliefs about promising research topics might guide perspective authors. Finally, these reviewers and other academicians conduct advertising research; thus, their beliefs about research impediments may suggest why researchers who study advertising ethics have chosen certain research questions or research methods. For example, researchers may rely on convenience samples because they believe—correctly or incorrectly—that outside funding is unavailable.

**Sample Profile: Education, Advertising Interests, and Publication Record.** Respondents' educational backgrounds varied considerably. As undergraduates, roughly one-half of the respondents received their degrees after 1970, 18.1 percent were marketing majors, 12.9 percent were psychology majors, and 25.0 percent were non-business majors. As doctoral students, roughly one-half of the respondents took their first doctoral seminar after 1976, 68.1 percent majored in marketing, 15.5 percent majored in communications, 7.8 percent majored in psychology, 22.2 percent minored in psychology, 12.0 percent minored in marketing, and 24.1 percent minored in a non-business discipline. Although respondents received their doctorates from 53 different universities, 31.4 percent graduated from a Big Ten school, 10.5 percent graduated from a Southwest Conference school, and 10.5 percent graduated from a PAC 10 school.

Many respondents had expertise in several subareas

of advertising. (We instructed respondents that expertise meant either "having taught a course or having conducted research in a subarea.") Roughly three-quarters of the respondents indicated consumer behavior as a subarea of expertise, roughly one-half indicated advertising messages and research methodology as subareas of expertise, and roughly one-third indicated legal and societal studies, management of advertising, media and advertising, and targeting and segmentation, as subareas of expertise.

Finally, many respondents are active advertising researchers. Respondents had a mean of 9.08 (std. dev. = 8.01) advertising-related articles accepted for publication in all scholarly outlets, a mean of 3.48 (std. dev. = 4.24) advertising-related articles accepted for publication in five select advertising journals (i.e., *International Journal of Advertising*, *Journal of Advertising*, *Journal of Advertising Research*, *Journal of Current Issues and Research in Advertising*, and *Journalism Quarterly*), and a mean of 1.72 (std. dev. = 2.76) advertising-related articles accepted for publication in three top marketing journals (i.e., *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Journal of Consumer Research*).

Thus, we conclude that our diverse sample of well-informed and accomplished advertising researchers (1) can prescribe a meaningful set of opportunities for research on advertising ethics, and (2) will express beliefs about the research impediments that affect active advertising researchers.

### Results

Respondents clearly believe that some types of impediments hinder research on advertising ethics more than other types of impediments. Table 3 shows respondents believe that the items concerning lack of practitioner interest pose the greatest impediment, items concerning lack of sound measures and frameworks pose the second greatest impediment, items concerning lack of academic interest pose the third greatest impediment, and items concerning lack of relevant theory in related disciplines pose the smallest impediment. Furthermore, respondents view funding constraints and the concomitant reliance on convenience samples as a significantly greater impediment ( $p < 0.05$  or better) than all other impediments but corporate disinterest, and viewed the lack of relevant theories in all related disciplines as significantly lesser impediments ( $p < 0.05$  or better) than all other impediments.

Regarding the importance of different research are-

**Table 3**  
**Relative Importance of Impediments to Research**

Impediments to Research	Mean	Standard Deviation
<b>Lack of Practitioner Interest</b>		
Funding constraints cause frequent dependence on student or other convenience samples	4.11	1.58
Corporate disinterest in sponsoring empirical research on advertising ethics	3.77	1.61
Difficult for practitioners to apply published work to daily operations	3.67	1.74
<b>Lack of Sound Measures and Frameworks</b>		
Lack of psychometrically-sound measurement scales	3.69	1.74
Lack of sound theoretical frameworks in advertising and marketing	3.55	1.72
<b>Lack of Academic Interest</b>		
General lack of journal editor/reviewer interest	3.36	1.48
Belief by journal editors/reviewers that advertising ethics is a minor issue	3.32	1.55
Difficult for researchers to relate ethical issues to traditional advertising issues	3.22	1.72
<b>Lack of Relevant Theory in Related Disciplines</b>		
Lack of relevant psychological theory	2.75	1.62
Lack of relevant sociological theory	2.73	1.61
Lack of relevant anthropological theory	2.51	1.57
Lack of relevant management/human resources theory	2.49	1.45
Lack of relevant philosophical theory	2.39	1.67

Note: Respondents used a 1 to 7 scale, where 1 = not an impediment, and 7 = major impediment, to rate how much each of these problems impedes research on advertising ethics. On average, differences in scale means of 0.40 or more are statistically significant at the 0.05 level or better. Differences in scale means of 0.43 or more are statistically significant at the 0.05 level or better. All these results are based on two-tailed t-tests.

**Table 4**  
**Relative Importance of General Research Arenas to the Study of Advertising Ethics**

General Research Arena	Mean	Standard Deviation
Development of theoretically and psychometrically sound scales for measuring the public's attitude about the ethicality of some advertising practices	5.25	1.44
The relationship between beliefs about the ethicalness of an ad and the efficacy of an ad	5.07	1.46
The beliefs of advertisers or advertising agencies about the ethicality of their advertising policies and actions	4.94	1.32
The processes that consumers use to evaluate the ethicalness of ads, rather than the results of their evaluations	4.88	1.53
The relationship between the traditional measures of advertising research (such as attitude toward the ad) and measures of ethical attitudes (such as moral conservatism)	3.93	1.47

Note: Respondents used a 1 to 7 scale, where 1 = totally unimportant, and 7 = critically important, to rate the importance of these general research arenas to the study of advertising ethics. On average, differences in scale means of 0.30 or more are statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Differences in scale means of 0.37 or more are statistically significant at the 0.05 level. All these results are based on two-tailed t-tests.

nas to the study of advertising ethics, Table 4 shows that respondents:

- (1) judged the "development of theoretically and psychometrically-sound scales for measuring the public's attitude about the ethicality of some advertising practices" as significantly more important ( $p < 0.05$  or better) than all arenas but "the relationship between beliefs about the ethicalness of an ad and the efficacy of an ad," and
- (2) judged "the relationship between the traditional measures of advertising research and measures of ethical attitudes" as significantly less important ( $p < 0.001$ ) than any other research arena.

Furthermore, in an absolute sense, respondents judged these general research arenas as somewhat important to research on advertising ethics (i.e., average ratings were toward the "critically important" rather than the "totally unimportant" end of the scale).

To suggest favored and disfavored research topics, we ranked the average importance scores on thirty-three researchable topics. Table 5 shows that the

highest-ranked topics were use of deception, advertising to children, ads for tobacco and alcoholic beverages, negative political ads, and the use of stereotypes in ads. Despite the recent controversies over condom ads, abortion ads, and the use of sexual themes in ads, and the ongoing controversy over the effects of ads on society, these topics ranked only slightly above average in importance and scored significantly lower ( $p < 0.05$  or better) than the highest-ranked topics. The use of fear appeals, the use of emotional appeals, ads for medical products and services, and the use of Public Service Announcements ranked slightly below average in importance. Corporate advocacy ads, comparative advertising, and ads for professional services ranked low in importance and scored significantly lower ( $p < 0.05$  or better) than condom ads and the like. Finally, ads for personal care and hygiene products ranked last in importance, which suggests that such ads are viewed as offensive but ethical.

Tables 2 and 5 offer considerably different prescriptions for the most promising research topics. Both respondents' beliefs and the volume of recent research suggest that (1) promising topics are the ethics of alcohol ads, tobacco ads, political ads, and sex or AIDS-



**Table 5**  
**Relative Importance of Different Topics to the Study of Advertising Ethics**

Topic of Study	Mean	Std. Dev.
Use of deception in ads	5.77	1.36
Advertising to children	5.61	1.35
Cigarette and tobacco ads	5.52	1.48
Alcoholic beverage ads	5.50	1.46
Negative political ads	5.45	1.55
Racial stereotyping in ads	5.24	1.43
Sexual stereotyping in ads	5.17	1.52
AIDS-awareness ads	5.07	1.62
Effect of ads on editorial content of the media	4.90	1.68
Effect of ads on the values of society	4.87	1.75
Ethical codes of ad agencies and the media	4.83	1.51
Anti-abortion ads	4.83	1.63
Ads for abortion services or family planning	4.80	1.60
Condom ads	4.74	1.57
International differences in ad ethics	4.74	1.75
Self-regulation by the ad industry	4.68	1.59
Information content of ads	4.63	1.71
Use of sexual themes in ads	4.60	1.71
Effect of ads on the material wants of society	4.58	1.85
Use of fear appeals in ads	4.51	1.70
Anti-cigarette Public Service Announcements	4.48	1.61
Anti-alcohol Public Service Announcements	4.38	1.57
Ads for medical products and services	4.37	1.66
Use of emotional appeals in ads	4.21	1.82
Anti-drug Public Service Announcements	4.16	1.52
Corporate advocacy ads	4.15	1.53
Comparative advertising	4.07	1.65
Ads for cosmetic or other elective surgery	4.06	1.62
Ads for professional services	4.03	1.58
Military recruiting ads	3.89	1.45
Ads for workers to replace striking workers	3.89	1.58
Professional athletes as ad spokespersons	3.75	1.57
Ads for personal care and hygiene products	3.58	1.56

Note: Respondents used a 1 to 7 scale, where 1 = totally unimportant, and 7 = critically important, to rate the importance of these topics to the study of advertising ethics. On average, differences in scale means of 0.40 or more are statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Differences in scale means of 0.46 or more are statistically significant at the 0.05 level. All these results are based on two-tailed t-tests.

related ads, and (2) an unpromising topic is corporate advertising. Respondents judged professional services and health care services/providers as minimally-promising topics, yet articles on these topics dominate recent research on advertising ethics (i.e., 36 percent of surveyed articles). Furthermore, respondents judged deception in ads and ads for children as highly-promising topics; yet there are few recent articles on these topics. Finally, respondents judged the ethics of different ad appeals, self-regulation of the ad industry, the information content of ads, international differences in ad ethics, and the effects of ads on society, as moderately-promising topics, yet there are no recent articles on these topics.

## Discussion

The empirical evidence suggests that advertising ethics is a fertile area for future research. Our search of the *ABI/Inform* database shows that advertising ethics has been, and continues to be, a mainstream topic in advertising research. Our random sample of AAA-affiliated academicians generally rated advertising ethics as an important area for future research.

Where should researchers who are interested in advertising ethics focus their efforts? As the most promising topics for future research, AAA-affiliated academicians suggested the use of deception, advertising to children, ads for legal vices, negative political ads, and stereotyping in ads; as the next most promising topics, they suggested sex-related ads, ad agency concerns, and questionable effects on society; as the least promising topics, they suggested public service announcements, health care and professional ads, and ad voice/tone. Because the topics judged the most promising by these academicians differ considerably from the topics covered in the recent literature, we advise researchers interested in advertising ethics:

- (1) to continue research on the ethics of alcohol ads, tobacco ads, political ads, and sex or AIDS-related ads;
- (2) to substitute research on some previously-explored topics, such as the ethics of professional services and comparative advertising, with research on relatively unexplored yet promising topics, such as deception in ads and ads for children; and
- (3) to develop theoretically and psychometrically sound scales for measuring the public's attitude about the ethicality of some advertising practices. Some researchers, such as Skipper

and Hyman (1993), suggest that the *de facto* standard for measuring ethical evaluations, the Reidenbach and Robin (1990) Multidimensional Ethics Scale, is problematic. Thus, advertising researchers who develop improved measures will make a major contribution to the literature on advertising ethics.

For research on advertising ethics to become either more scientific (e.g., better samples, better research designs, more substantial research questions) or more applied (i.e., useful to advertising practitioners), researchers must secure outside funding for their studies. Until advertising researchers overcome their belief that practitioners find advertising ethics irrelevant to advertising practice, such funding will be limited.

## Caveats

Our empirically-based overview is limited in two ways. First, our keyword search of the *ABI/Inform* database selected articles for which advertising ethics was a stated focus; such a search omitted both articles with ethical implications for advertising practice and books or monographs on advertising ethics. Thus, we probably understated the volume of research on advertising ethics. Second, we only sampled AAA-affiliated academicians, so we only know academicians' beliefs about research impediments. Future research might reveal practitioners' beliefs about advertising ethics and their propensity to support academic research on advertising ethics.

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